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COTTON IN SYRIA

United States mission estimated that 50 per cent of the land was in fallow during 1948.[31] Increased irrigation and high prices for agricultural commodities have reduced significantly the fallow in the past few years, and the percentage may be less now.

PRODUCTION

Syria is normally self-sufficient in most foods. In fact, the country exports fresh and dried fruits, lentils and other legumes, tobacco, wool, butter, hides, and meat. Occasional poor harvests make it necessary to import food grains.

The greatest deficiency is in rice, which has been displaced by cotton in recent years to such an extent that almost all of the country's requirements must be imported. Last year's bad cotton crop may prompt farmers to revert to rice and, if so, this will reduce the deficiency.

Government figures indicate that production of food has not kept pace with the expansion in population and that the per capita food supply and individual calorie intake are both declining.[32] These conclusions are based on highly conjectural statistics and are in conflict with opinions of the United States Agricultural Attache and Syrian officials who are intimately acquainted with the country's agricultural problems. These observers believe there has been no real decline in food consumption, except possibly for short periods of time. Certainly there is no shortage now, and the bumper cereal crop in 1952 should enable the country to fill domestic needs and export at least 30 per cent of its wheat and possibly 50 per cent of its barley.

The daily diet consists largely of starches, it is true, but this is due more to habit than anything else. The resources of the country are ample to permit a much more balanced diet.

PRODUCTIVITY

Syrian agriculture often is characterized by the low productivity of the agricultural worker. It is obvious that a great many more people are used on each acre of land than is necessary. The low agricultural income is reflected in the obvious poverty of the people. Yet, comparisons with other countries, and even detailed calculations, are of questionable value due to the unreliability of the statistics.

Government reports on average yields also are open to question. Official figures show that wheat yields have dropped sharply, while cotton yields have tended upward, except for the extremely bad year in 1951-52. They also show very wide fluctuation. Experienced observers point out that the yields are especially questionable because both acreage and production figures are not reliable. On the basis of conversations with producers in various sections, it is apparent that yields are normally fairly high and that they fluctuate, depending on water availability and on insect devastation.

POTENTIALITIES

A number of missions which have studied the possibilities of agricultural development in Syria, especially in the last five or six years, all mention the

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31 *Activities of FAO, 1950-52*, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, 1952, p. 58.

32 *Development of Food and Agricultural Resources in the Near East*, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, Rome, November, 1951.